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**THE INFODEMIA
PARADOX IN THE
BRAZILIAN PRE-
ELECTION SCENARIO:
IS IT ALWAYS – OR ONLY
– THE PRESS’S FAULT?**

Boanerges Balbino Lopes Filho

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Abstract: In the text, we try to reflect on the paradox between the belief attributed to the population in disinformation and false information and the relatively high trust in traditional media coverage. It also seeks to discuss the triangulation between the scientific community, the press and society, in which some researchers are often purists in the way they present results, reporting exactly what they found, leaving open the individualized interpretation of the effects. In addition, the reasons for scientific deformities arising from communication difficulties are sought, whether due to technical excesses of researchers, which can generate misunderstandings or lack of dedication on the part of LOPES FILHO, Boanerges Balbino. Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais State. Full Professor, Doctor in Communication and Culture from UFRJ, Brazil, bblopes@ufff.br journalists who must think carefully about issues raised in the period. The study is characterized by an exploratory condition with literature review, dialogue and debate centered on authors such as Arbex Jr, Avritzer, Braga, Campos Mello, Da Empoli, Kakutani, Mamou, Vasconcellos, Rocha, among others. It aims to stimulate the perception that values two-way actions that can identify the population's desires with objective, precise and clear information, which provide the expansion of channels with adequate messages to better deal with the complexity that involves the health area.

Keywords: Journalism; beliefs; post-truth; infodemic.

INTRODUCTION - "OVERLOAD" OF INFORMATION

The world faces a pandemic in the "post-truth" era, caused by the excess of news on certain topics, in which public opinion is shaped more by the appeal to emotions and beliefs than by facts. The World Health Organization (WHO) has

christened this phenomenon an infodemic: "an overabundance of information — some accurate and some not — that often makes it difficult for people to find reliable sources and guidance when they need it." According to the WHO, as some of the sources are accurate and others are not, it becomes difficult in specific situations to observe reliable guidelines when necessary. The entity warns: the phenomenon is amplified by social networks and spreads quickly, like a virus. With this, it generates anxiety, panic attacks and shakes people's emotional.

According to researcher Ricardo Ricardo Cavalcante, coordinator of Infocovid, a research group at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, MG, the infodemic is a phenomenon investigated in greater depth from 2020 onwards, but some researchers have pointed out since then that more and more we would be exposed to a volume of excessive information impacting health, especially mental health. Maybe that's why we didn't realize the threat announced in advance by the WHO about Covid-19. What made the co-author of the work "10 stories to understand a chaotic world", the teacher, writer and columnist for the Portuguese newspaper O Observador, Ruth Manus (2020) question: How did we not know this as soon as Covid-19 emerged? For Cavalcante, our ability to process and filter information is limited. It considers that in this "overload" of information, there are those that may have some intentionality.

This implies that in an "ocean of messages", decision-making can be difficult both for the common citizen and for the health manager, and also for communicators. Brazil is one of the countries where people most believe in fake news. Contradictorily, it is the one who claims to be more concerned with what is false and true among the information that circulates on the internet. The paradox is demonstrated by the study carried out in 2018

by the Ipsos institute, entitled fake news, filter bubbles, post-truth and trust, where 62% of respondents in Brazil admitted to having believed in fake news until they discovered it was not true. The percentage was above the world average of 48%. Brazil appears in third in the ranking among countries, with 35%. Another data to highlight is presented by Vasconcellos (2020), on his page "About data, politics and everything else". Citing the survey "Democracy Perception Index 2020", carried out by the Dalia Research Institute, based in Berlin, it indicates that 34% of Brazilians consider the country's performance in dealing with the Covid crisis "very good". The percentage, however, is the lowest identified among the 53 countries in the survey. The ranking is led by Vietnam (95%), China (95%) and Malaysia (89%), countries considered non-free or partially free, by the institute.

The so-called "major media" or traditional media is today - with all its complexities, paradoxes and contradictions - a support column for the current powers - if not the popularly called "fourth power", a condition of supposed understanding that permeates a good part of it. of society. According to journalist and writer Arbex Jr. (2003), the press helps to build "perceptions, produce partial "realities", distort facts, mystify and even act as a "party", proclaiming itself a spokesperson for the "general interests" of civil society. But, in fact, says the journalist, he often focuses more on defending internal issues and private achievements and puts the public interest in second place.

Faced with the complexity that surrounds it and the contradictions that present themselves added to the volume of circulating information, society's perception becomes somewhat thick. As a result, the blame for everything bad that may occur in a given conjuncture or in mismatches caused by governments or authorities is

often transferred by denounced parties or by groups that support these segments to media organizations and their direct or visible representatives.

WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

The symptom is pandemic. It goes back and forth to the taste of times and places. Especially when they're dark. In other words, it affects governments that are not very fond of transparency in dealing with information. And the worst. The idea that an alleged blame for the excesses and ills that occur in these periods almost always falls on the press. It is as if a virus survived latent in common sense, could cross the centuries and manifest itself in contingents from time to time around the world. A noticeable phenomenon in Brazil and in the world, the infodemic does not come only from fake news, but from all kinds of information that involve, in addition to traditional media, the dominated social media, conducive to the intense and agile circulation of information.

If we go back to the early 1990s, for example, it is not difficult to remember what is stated in the report by Yves Mamou, then an economic journalist and one of the editors of the French newspaper Le Monde, in "The press is to blame". In the work, even though the author highlights misinformation, lies and deception, in a type of "letter" based on bad faith in the game for power, used by politicians and merchants as possibilities to corrupt society - in order to provoke second intentions and discredit -, to the common citizen, the press is the main culprit of these evils. But you don't have to go that far. Not in history, much less territorially.

Vice President Hamilton Mourão blamed the Brazilian press in an article published in the newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo, in May 2021, for the "institutional damage". In his view, it "is leading the country to chaos".

Mourão emphasizes that the “great institution of opinion” needs to review its procedures in this calamity we are experiencing. In his partner in the presidency someone much more fierce in the attacks carried out on a constant basis. And that goes beyond. Bolsonaro incites animosity to journalists from the Palácio da Alvorada - in almost every morning when professionals and supporters live very closely - to the intense and to messages sent by accounts via WhatsApp and Twitter on a daily basis.

HARD NOT TO LEAVE FOR JOURNALISTS

In March 2021, for example, Bolsonaro directly attributed to the press, blame for the distortion in the widely disseminated news, but rebutted in his media version of a joke he told himself about the weak GDP. When he spoke later on one of the mornings about the coronavirus pandemic, he compared professionals to “vultures”. He also mocked the working conditions of journalists as they waited for statements: “If you are attacked every day, what are you doing here? The space is public, but what are you doing here?” Tensions escalated as Bolsonaro yelled at journalists to shut up. And some of the members of the popularly called “cercadinho” or “chiqueirinho” – a demarcated space in which supporters and followers also gather when the passing president speaks – were somewhat aggressive with jeering and threats to press professionals.

The episode caused the groups Globo, Folha de S. Paulo, Band and the newspapers Correio Braziliense and Metr opoles to announce the suspension of coverage in that space at Pal acio do Alvorada, from the end of May of the same year, for an indefinite period, alleging “lack of security”. But not even this position of some communication vehicles changed the perception of a certain segment

of society. At least according to data from the IBRE FGV survey carried out with the support of Estad ao, between May and June 2021. The study points out, among other data, what seems to be worrying: being close to someone who died from Covid-19. 19 reduces the chances of right-wing and center-right voters to vote for Bolsonaro by around 20%. However, having the conservative identity with the President can guarantee almost 90% of that voter’s support for the captain’s reelection.

Report data *Digital News Report 2020*, A global survey by the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, where more than 80,000 people were interviewed in 40 countries and six continents, points to a contradictory situation: politicians are the most frequently cited source of disinformation, although in some countries people who identify themselves as right-wing groups are more likely to blame the media. Minimally strange paradox.

CONTRADICTIONS AND ATTACKS

According to journalist and writer Jos e Arbex Jr, the press helps to build “perceptions, produce partial “realities”, distort facts, mystify – and even act as a “party”, self-proclaiming itself as a spokesperson for “general interests”. of civil society. But, in fact, says the journalist, he often focuses more on defending internal issues and private achievements and puts the public interest in second place. Faced with the complexity that surrounds it and the contradictions that present themselves added to the volume of circulating information, society’s perception becomes somewhat thick. As a result, the blame for everything bad that may occur in a given conjuncture or in mismatches caused by governments or authorities is often transferred by denounced parties or by groups that support these segments to media

organizations and their direct or visible representatives.

The Brazilian Association of radio and television broadcasters (Abert) warned in June 2021 that the professional media suffered 11,000 attacks per day through social networks in the previous year – an average of seven attacks per minute. The data is contained in the annual report on Violations of Freedom of Expression, coordinated by Bites, a consulting company that monitors the digital universe. It found that of the 5,708 posts by President Jair Bolsonaro on Twitter, for example, 432 contained criticism, insinuations and warnings about the work of vehicles and journalists. The document reports that the content recorded 51.7 million interactions (shares, retweets, comments and likes), equivalent to 7% of the 737.4 million obtained on the president's profiles last year.

During the whole year, the survey also identified 3.9 million posts against the Brazilian press, totaling 10% of everything that was produced. These posts include profanity or expressions that try to discredit journalistic work. On World Press Freedom Day, celebrated every May 3, the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj) published new data on attacks by the President of the Republic against journalism and journalists: there were 179 attacks in four months, 28 occurrences of direct attacks on journalists, two incidents directed at FENAJ and 149 attempts to discredit the press. According to the report, the statements remain aggressive when related to the context of the coronavirus. Bolsonaro tries to blame the press for “chaos” or “hysteria” regarding the disease.

INFODEMIC, PRESENT!

The American journalist David J. Rothkopf, creator of the term infodemic, mentions for the first time in his column about the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory

Syndrome) epidemic in the Washington Post, in 2003. He says that some facts, mixed with fear, speculation and rumour, amplified and transmitted rapidly around the world by modern information technologies, have affected national and international economies, politics and even security in ways that are totally out of proportion to basic realities.

A Kaspersky study, called “The infodemic and the impacts on digital life”, carried out in 2021, found that 78% of Brazilians feel saturated with information. As the conclusions of the survey carried out during the pandemic reveal, more than 50% of Brazilians consumed “more or much more” news compared to a normal year. In addition, three quarters felt saturated because of the large amount of information on the same topic. However, according to Livia Vieira, journalist, professor at UFBA and editor of Farol Jornalismo, the Covid-19 crisis has substantially increased the consumption of news from the mainstream media and also from online and social media. For example, last April, trust in media coverage of Covid-19 was relatively high and represented more than double the trust placed in information circulating on social media, video platforms or messaging services. In short, according to the professor, the coronavirus crisis has reminded people of the value of traditional news sources.

THE “WIRELESS PHONE” OF BROADCASTING

The infodemic is also accentuated by other aspects. Tiago Reis, a researcher at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, believes that scientists must take some of the blame for the “cordless phone”. He points out that in the triangulation between the scientific community, the press and society, some researchers are often purists in the way they present results, as they seek to report exactly what they have found, leaving open the

individualized interpretation of the effects. “As a researcher, I don’t like that: I believe that we must offer something more than pure results”, he emphasizes.

Professor Mariana Cabral, a researcher in journalism and history, says that, when publicizing her research, she always strives to “make the person reflect together”. She understands that scientific deformities are born from the difficulty of communication. very technical, which can generate misunderstandings”. He considers that some of the difficulties need to be shared with the press, since journalists may also not dedicate themselves to thinking more carefully about the issues that are being raised in the period. Therefore, he justifies that there are flaws communication on both sides and because of that, so many misunderstandings.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is perhaps no recipe for the problems that drive the infodemic to be resolved so quickly. However, an orientation that values two-way actions that can identify the population’s desires with objective, precise and clear information, can provide the expansion of channels that carry adequate messages and make it possible to better deal with the complexity that involves the health area.

As in the example of the Ministry of Health when creating a fake news verification service that can be accessed by WhatsApp. Or by well-conducted initiatives such as Fiocruz, in which researchers from the National School of Public Health, Claudia Galhardi and Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo, identified the main social networks propagating false news about the new coronavirus in Brazil. The study analyzed complaints and fake news received by the “Eu Fiscalizo” app between March and April 2021, and showed the most used social media for the dissemination of fake news about the new coronavirus. The data revealed

that 10.5% of fake news were published on Instagram, 15.8% on Facebook and 73.7% circulated on WhatsApp. The results also point to positive data: 26.6% of fake news published on Facebook attribute Fiocruz as an advisor with regard to protection against the new coronavirus.

Or even with the publication of initiatives such as the e-book, the result of collaborative work between members of the Infocovid multicentric research involving professors from UFJE, and from the federal universities of São Paulo (USP), Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Rio Grande do Sul, Viçosa (UFV), in addition to researchers from Mexico and Peru. According to Cavalcante, the chapters bring the concepts that emerge from this discussion about the disinformation ecosystem such as Information Fatigue Syndrome, Infodemia, fake news. The researcher ensures that the book contributes to the gap in understanding what the infodemic is about and how professionals and researchers can develop strategies to mitigate the effects of misinformation on the health of populations. As a continuation of the study, the group also intends to measure the impact of exposure to information, whether by radio, television and social networks, in order to screen for symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety in the elderly.

In Cavalcante’s opinion, government health institutions, such as the Ministry of Health, can create legitimate sources of information and make them available reliably. And so, inoculate reliable information, in order to avoid an informational void and make it reach the layers of the population. He guarantees that verification mechanisms and scientific dissemination are great allies in the fight against disinformation: “The science we produce needs to be translated into a language accessible to the population, arousing greater confidence to adopt the measures defended by scientists”, he emphasizes.

On the other “side of the counter”, greater transparency of the intricacies and functioning that surround the media and social media becomes essential for health professionals and society. According to Tabakman (2013), the current situation of the health press is the culmination of a very rapid evolution and still in the process of change. Readers’ interest in the health area is nothing more than a reflection of a change in attitude in which patients take charge of their own health and seek information from all possible sources. Contact between the media and specialist voices becomes increasingly fluid, facilitated by the activities of the press and communication offices. However,

emphasizes the author, perhaps the youth of health journalism itself, many factors undermine quality. For example: the editorial line that tends towards spectacle, corporatism and the excessive search for personal credit or the naivety or lack of training on both sides, in addition to pressures from different origins.

But actions such as Projeto Comprova, a coalition of vehicles and entities that identify dubious information about the new coronavirus by monitoring social networks are differentials of these new times. Most likely, this will gradually uncover the real culprits in feeding misinformation and lies and fostering the perennality of the infodemic.

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